

VZCZCXYZ0000
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSN #0458 0541745
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 231745Z FEB 06
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1127
INFO RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEHZA/WHAG CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS SAN SALVADOR 000458

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [ES](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SMIG](#)
SUBJECT: LATEST POLL INDICATES DEAD HEAT IN SAN SALVADOR

¶1. The Technological University of El Salvador (UTECH) Center for Salvadoran Public Opinion Research (CIOPS) polled 2,123 Salvadorans nationwide February 17-19, and performed an additional poll of 615 San Salvador residents. The race for mayor of San Salvador appears close, with 27.3 percent of respondents favoring the FMLN's Violeta Menjivar, versus 22.7 percent for ARENA's Rodrigo Samayoa. Thirty percent of San Salvador residents either expressed no preference or remained undecided; the race's outcome hinges on the ability of each party to mobilize its partisans to vote and on the ultimate decision of a large block of undecided voters. The poll had a two percent margin of error.

¶2. With regard to races in departmental capitals around the country, the poll shows that FMLN Santa Tecla Mayor Oscar Ortiz continues to maintain a strong lead as he seeks re-election, as does Mayor Orlando Mena of Santa Ana, who, although elected in 2003 as an FMLN member, now runs as a Christian Democratic Party (PDC) candidate. Mayor Will Salgado of San Miguel, who was elected on the ARENA ticket but now belongs to the National Conciliation Party (PCN) is trouncing the ARENA candidate, with 76 percent of the vote. Races in the departmental capital of Usulutan and San Salvador suburb Soyapango, however, appear too close to call.

¶3. Comment: This and other recent polls indicate that, notwithstanding Salvadorans' consistent preference for ARENA presidential candidates, a significant number of voters, especially those in large urban areas, continue to favor mayoral candidates from the FMLN or parties other than ARENA for their municipal government. Likewise, several familiar incumbents with proven track records and high name recognition, like the populist Salgado or the effective Ortiz are trouncing the ARENA party candidates despite changing party banners and having a clear disadvantage in campaign resources. According to the latest polls, San Salvador is trending away from ARENA, a clear concern for President Saca, who believes he must win San Salvador to maintain his political momentum.

Butler